

LOOKING GLASS: MUMBAI

BY KENNETH HITE



Pelgrane Press

LOOKING GLASS:

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MUMBAI

In Bombay all Indias met and merged. In Bombay, too, all-India met what-what-not-India, what came across the black water to flow into our veins. Everything north of Bombay was North India, everything south of it was South. To the east lay India's east and to the west, the world's West. Bombay was central; all rivers flowed into its human sea. It was an ocean of stories; we were its narrators, and everybody talked at once.

-- Salman Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh*

This look at India's mightiest metropolis, from its legendary crime syndicates to its glamorous movie colony, of necessity holds plenty of rash generalizations, needed for game play and speed of familiarization. More than many cities, Mumbai relishes its contradictions, its vastly rich and abysmally poor literally living side by side. As with most Pelgrane publications, this supplement exists in a world of instantaneous oceans of information, and is not intended to be comprehensive. Instead, it combines a few evocative details with broad-brush color. It is intended as a starter, letting you begin cooking Mumbai as a "Low and Slow" city setting for many possible GUMSHOE games. It is a foundation for your own adventures, a framework on which to hang the fruits of your own research.

The capital of India's Maharashtra state, Mumbai was better known as Bombay for the last 500 years. Named "beautiful little bay" (*Bom baim*) by the Portuguese when they annexed the area in 1535, the city began as seven islands at the mouth of the Ulhas River. The British East India Company took over Bombay in 1668 and spent the next 150 years acquiring the nearby swampy coasts and islands to secure the harbor. By 1869, the seven original islands, joined by causeways and reclaimed sea floor, had become a single island and the largest port in western India.



MUMBAI: ONE LOOK

POPULATION

12.5 million (the same as New York City and Los Angeles combined), packed into twice the density of New York City. Thane, Navi Mumbai, and other surrounding cities add 11 million more (the population of Ohio) to the metropolitan total, all inside a land area smaller than Connecticut.

LANGUAGES

Marathi, Hindi, English, Gujarati; the city dialect Bambaiya is a colloquial form of Hindi.

CURRENCY

Indian rupee (rule of thumb; Rs 50 = \$1). When speaking of large amounts of money, a lakh is Rs 100,000 (~\$2,000); a crore is 100 lakhs or Rs 10,000,000 (~\$200,000).

BEST HOTEL

Taj Mahal Palace in Colaba, built in 1903 by the Parsi businessman Jamsedji Tata. The 22-story Tower wing was built in 1973. This five-star hotel was bombed during the 2008 terror attacks; it now boasts top of the line security (all Infiltration, Filch, etc. Difficulties increase by +1) including X-ray scans of baggage. Presidential Suite: \$7,000+/night.

BAD NEIGHBORHOOD

The most crimes are reported in a central belt of suburbs, from west to east: Bandra East, Vile Parle East (just south of the airport), Kurla (across the polluted Mithi River from Vile Parle East), and Ghatkopar East. All of these neighborhoods have islands of middle-class and upper-class housing.

SPECIAL RULES EFFECTS

The Difficulty of tests to acquire **illegal firearms** or **illicitly move money** in or out of Mumbai is 1 less than normal. Most black-market weapons will be Chinese-made, such as AK-56 assault rifles, or "country-made" illegal knockoffs of 9mm pistols or more sophisticated weapons. Such "katta pistols" jam on an unmodified roll of 1.

In June, Mumbai welcomes the **monsoon**, which can last until September. In July, the rains can pour over 800 mm per day onto the city. Visibility drops; outdoor gunplay at Near or longer range requires both an infrared scope and a 1-point spend of Shooting.

By default, all **chases** in the crowded streets or buildings of Mumbai are Cramped chases unless the GM specifically decides that conditions are Normal (which is to say, abnormally light for Mumbai). Getting to or setting up an Open chase requires a spend of Urban Survival ("I remember that the museum was closed" or "I know a construction site that stopped work while the bribes go through").

LAYOUT THE LAND

Mumbai covers most of Salsette Island on the west coast of India, running from its southern tip (the ritzy Colaba neighborhood) up to Sanjay Gandhi National Park, a rain forest the size of Paris. South Mumbai (also known as “Island City” or just “town”) is, by and large, the rich business and tourist section. Across the Mahim Creek, the suburbs to the north sprout forests of cheap apartment buildings spearing up from vast slums. The easternmost side of suburban Mumbai remains marshy and undeveloped, land reclamation slowed by bureaucratic tangles and ecological concerns alike. The suburban west coast, by contrast, is prime development turf: Juhu Place, the “Beverly Hills of Bollywood,” is almost the equal of Malabar Hill (Mumbai’s tony old money-government zone) or Cuffe Parade (the nouveau riche multinational business district) in South Mumbai.

The thousand slums of Mumbai mostly run down the middle of the island, along hill ridges and between railway lines. Two-thirds of Mumbai’s people live in slums, often without title on plots of land leased by their grandparents. Some slum housing is relatively well-kept, if of makeshift corrugated-iron and blue-tarpaulin construction, but hundreds of thousands of Mumbaikars simply sleep in the streets or gutters — when there are such amenities as gutters in the neighborhood. Over 1.5 million people live packed into Dharavi, a slum only 2.6 km square. But slums exist all over the city; the Babasaheb Ambedkar Nagar slum (home of domestic servants and fishermen) abuts the posh Cuffe Parade in Colaba.

GATEWAYS

The symbol of Mumbai is a triumphal arch, the literal Gateway to India, built to welcome King George V to the city in 1911 but not finished until 1924. Kings aside, Mumbai’s ports handle 70% of India’s seaborne trade; container ships increasingly put in at the new facility in Navi Mumbai eastward across Thane Creek. The eastern shore also hosts Mumbai’s naval dockyards; the naval base itself is in the Naval Nagar at the extreme

southern tip of the city.

Civilians mostly enter Mumbai through either the Mumbai Central train station or the ornate 1887 Indo-Saracenic Victoria Terminus, renamed in 1996 for the medieval hero-king of Maharashtra, Chhatrapati Shivaji. “CST” handles three million passengers a day, often jammed into and onto train cars designed for a third of their ridership. In rush hours, BEST commuter trains are crammed so full that office workers can’t bring a lunch pail. Westerners are more likely to fly into Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport in north-central suburban Mumbai, looking down at the slums piled up against or even inside its runway fences.

Some come to work in the Santacruz Electronics Export Processing Zone (SEEPZ) in the Andheri neighborhood north of the airport. A hub of computer hardware and software development, its special export laws have also attracted Mumbai’s flourishing jewelry and gemstone industry. Well aware of the potential for heist adventures here, SEEPZ requires permits and passes for all workers and visitors; guards man the gates against thieves, slum-dwellers, and economic saboteurs and spies. Despite these precautions, SEEPZ held at least one terror cell; the 2003 bombers stockpiled explosives nearby. SEEPZ also holds St. John the Baptist Church, a ruined 1579 Portuguese Jesuit church and graveyard that remain (after much controversy) Church property and holy ground.

Other temples around Mumbai draw pilgrims: the temple of Mumbadevi,

the city’s patron goddess, in Bhuleshwar; the Mahalaxmi Temple on “Breach Candy” Road near the American Consulate; the medieval temples Babulnath (dedicated to Shiva) and Banganga (built around a water tank dug by the god Rama); and the Hajji Ali Daragh, the tomb of a Muslim saint built at the end of a narrow causeway extending 500 meters into the Arabian Sea from Worli. The 40,000 pilgrims (of all faiths) must wait for low tide each day for their visit; high tide submerges the path.

MARKETS AND MASSES

Other masses have more secular interests. Both of India’s stock exchanges are on “India’s Wall Street,” Dalal Street in South Mumbai, and the nearby Nariman Point neighborhood boasts headquarters for Indian corporate giants such as Tata and Larsen & Toubro, along with global firms’ local branches. Mumbai is still a global textile and clothing powerhouse, with cloth mills, fashion studios, and sweatshops all across the city. Less gigantically, commerce thrives north of the CST in Mumbai’s historic bazaars: the Zaveri Bazaar, dedicated to precious metal and jewelry; Mangaldas Market in silk and cloth; Chor Bazaar (“Thieves’ Market”) for antiquities; and the Crawford Market (now Mahatma Phule Market) near the CST. This last is a 22,000+ square meter Victorian warren full of fruit and vegetable stands, along with gray-market imports, endangered animals, and still more dubious goods.

Mumbaikars come home from work, then leave their tiny apartments and spend their money in cinemas, street fairs, dance halls and nightclubs. The rich and

ATOMIC MUMBAI

Looking for a superhero origin, or a target for nuclear vampires or Azathoth cultists?

Mumbai plays a crucial role in India’s nuclear program. The Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) in Trombay designs reactors, processes waste, and studies nuclear medicine and biotechnology. The top Indian pure research establishment, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) in Colaba, began as an atomic theoretical institute and has expanded into high-energy physics, cosmic-ray physics, mathematics, computer science, and molecular biology. TIFR has a linear accelerator on line, as well as a moderate-scale Pelletron particle accelerator.

Mumbai’s atomic power plant is at Tarapur, 112 km up the coast.

beautiful mostly party in Colaba and nearby Churchgate, but trends in Mumbai change as fast as they do anywhere else. (Check *Time Out Mumbai* (timeoutmumbai.net) for what's hot Right Now.) Besides dancing and clubbing, Mumbai rejoices in athletics. But while Mumbai FC and FC Air India must share a stadium, Mumbai has two world-class cricket stadiums to contain the city's greatest sporting passion.

THREE BACKDROPS

Backdrops are what you set your stories against. They might be the main setting, a scenic or thematic element, or just somewhere to stage a fight scene.

ANTILLIA BUILDING

The world's most expensive home is a 27-story tower (173 meters tall) built in

2010 for Mumbai petrochemical and retail-empire magnate Mukesh Ambani. The land alone is worth \$1 billion, a whole block on Altamount Road in the middle of South Mumbai's pricey west side. Ambani literally tore down an orphanage to build his tower, which boasts three illegal helipads, a 168-car garage, and a staff of 600. As if all that didn't scream "Bond villain" loud enough, the building is named after Antillia, an imaginary island in the mid-Atlantic.

ELEPHANTA ISLAND

An hour's ferry ride from the Gateway of India, Elephanta Island boasts seven cave temples hewn from basalt and filled with magnificent 6m high religious statues: five Hindu caves and two smaller Buddhist caves. Carved by an unknown ruler some time between 450 and 750

A.D., the temples of Gharapuri ("city of caves") are a popular tourist destination. The local villagers (about 1,200 of them) are the only ones permitted to stay on the island after sunset.

GANESH CHATURTHI

The birthday of Lord Ganesh, son of Shiva and Parvati and patron of science, art, and wisdom, is Mumbai's biggest festival. Celebrated in August or September, it lasts 11 days and draws millions into the streets for parades, fireworks, enormous displays (*mandals*), and finally the climactic ritual submersion of elephant-headed idols of Ganesh in Mumbai's waters. Over 10,000 public mandals of Ganesh decorate the city during the holiday, often illustrating social concerns or highlighting political controversies.

HUNTERS

Depending on your politics, you likely seize on one of two crucial Mumbai conflicts. The first is that of the rich and influential vs. the poor and powerless. The liberalization of India's economy in 1991 stripped the socialist veneer from the competitive, even harsh truths of Indian society. Mumbai is a city with five new skyscrapers and five million people without toilets; a city with 26 billionaires and nine million slum dwellers. Mumbai has India's highest per capita GDP, but its residents average only 4.5 square meters of living space each. Riots and protests are common, as is the expulsion of slum-dwellers by housing and commercial developers and their gang allies. NGOs, priests, activists, journalists, Westerners, reformers, revolutionaries, and celebrities embrace the masses and excoriate the power structure, but somehow nothing changes.

The second conflict in Mumbai is usually cast as Hindus vs. Muslims, although the "Hindu" side often splinters between Marathi locals and north or south Indian outsiders. Mumbai is about two-thirds Hindu and one-sixth Muslim, with power (as is the Mumbai way) broadly distributed between sectors. Mumbai's reputation as a relatively tolerant city collapsed when Muslim riots on December 6, 1992 triggered violent Hindu backlash the next day. The city entered full-blown communal warfare, with mobs burning buses, looting

stores, and stabbing enemies and strangers alike. The Indian Army entered the fray on January 10, 1993, and after a week returned the city to normalcy, after around 1,000 deaths (the plurality shot by the Army). Two months later, Muslim Mumbai mobsters and the Pakistani secret police detonated 13 bombs across the city, killing 350 people and injuring 1,300. The Mumbai bombings opened a new phase of terrorism in the city: Islamist bombings and terror attacks in 2002, 2003 (four separate incidents), 2006, 2008, and 2011 keep the wounds of sectarian anger raw.

FACTIONS

Any city has its factions: a city of 12 million has more than most. To police this turbulent throng, Mumbai has 33,000 police officers. This is actually a considerably better ratio than India as a whole, but the force is concentrated in the tourist and wealthy areas. The result is a multi-year rash of rapes and a 10% conviction rate for murder. The Indian **Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)** provides a backstop for high-profile crimes, but is primarily concerned with corruption investigations (both by and of the CBI), international criminal activity in India, and in national criminal cases.

Particularly active player characters may wind up drawing the attention of **Force One**, the elite counter-terrorism unit of the Maharashtra State Police, or of the **Intelligence Bureau (IB)**, India's domestic intelligence and internal security agency. Extremely active adventurers may find themselves the target of an "encounter" killing.

Frustrated by paralytically slow courts and rampant corruption, the **Mumbai Police Detective Squad** stages "encounters" with notorious gangsters they believe cannot be effectively prosecuted. Sometimes the "Encounter Squad" ambushes the criminal after surveillance; other times police simply gun down a suspect in custody and falsify an "escape" record. Encounter killings in Mumbai began in 1982 with the ambush shooting at Wadala of thief, extortionist, and killer Manya Surve. "Encounter specialists" since then have killed as many as 1,200 Mumbai criminals in extra-judicial shootings. Inspector Pradeep Sharma alone has "cleaned" 104 people in his career, which was briefly interrupted by corruption charges. Encounters have played a major part in fracturing gang unity and mob effectiveness in Mumbai. They may also, of course, have been yet another way for mafia dons to wipe out enemies.

THE MOB

India's "Mafia Raj" is an intricate web of organized crime, trade union bosses, political fixers and local party heads, real estate developers, and bribed police and court officials. In the 1980s, the Mafia Raj globalized under the rulership of **Dawood Ibrahim**, who took over the *hawala* network of informal cash transfers between Muslims in Asia and Africa and turned it into a money laundering empire worth a billion dollars a year. Thus funded, his "**D-Company**" outfit mostly unified or cowed rival gangs for a decade, then splintered: trade liberalization destroyed smuggling profits, and Dawood's turn to Islamist terrorism (D-Company facilitated the 1993 bombings) alienated Hindu gangsters as well as those who wanted to keep a lower profile. Dawood left India around then; he splits his time between Afghanistan (where he has high-level Taliban contacts), Karachi, and Dubai. His lieutenant Chhota Shakeel runs D-Company business in Mumbai, strongest in the south, central, and northwest. In addition to extortion (*hafia* or *bapat* in local slang), contract killing, fixing sports events, arms and drug trafficking (now mostly cocaine and designer drugs), D-Company earns \$400 million or more a year from "legitimate" businesses such as malls and hotels. It also controls much of the waterfront, siphoning \$20 million or so a year just from stolen fuel.

Once a loyal D-Company underboss, **Chhota Rajan** now runs a mostly extortion-driven racket of his own from Bangkok. His gang is strongest in the east, from Sion at the edge of South Mumbai up to Mulund, along with the eastern suburbs of Chembur and Navi Mumbai. He has both warred with and allied with **Arun Gawli**, who built a kidnapping and extortion empire centered in Byculla in the late 1980s. Gawli was convicted and sentenced to life in prison in 1990, but continues to run his empire — including his own political party — from his cell, coming and going almost at will. Gawli's great rival in crime and politics is **Ashwin Naik**, trained as an engineer, who took over his brother Anan's gang after a hit. He survived an assassination attempt and a prison term, emerging to restart the gang war with Gawli in 2009. They contest central Mumbai; both gangs work

the same turf around Arthur Road, and in Lower Parel, Prabhadevi, and Girgaum. Two rival gangs from the southern city of Mangalore pushed into the western suburbs of Mumbai in the late 2000s, headed by two former Rajan soldiers named **Ravi Pujari** and **Hemant Pujari** (no relation). Another Mumbai boss, **Ejaz Lakdawala**, has worked for and gunned for both Rajan and Shakeel, and spent some time in Canadian custody before relocating to Bangkok.

GOALS AND STORIES

Every gang in Mumbai wants to recreate the D-Company's 1991 empire, very much including the D-Company. But like Mumbai itself, the city's underworld may have grown too large to manage. Mob shootings are common, including cinematic hits by assassins disguised as lawyers. Gang bosses all watch Bollywood crime films, and not just because many Bollywood stars and producers are mobbed up — film companies are great targets for extortion and outlets for laundering cash. The gangs fight over turf: not just real estate development (worth billions in a city with practically no room to expand) but cable and power companies (\$4 billion raked off wiring contracts), and even trash dumps. Controlling access to one dump can make \$30,000 a day in profit. All of this in a city where a cop's monthly salary averages \$140.

THE TERRORISTS

The main terror group operating in Mumbai is **Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)**, an Islamist insurgency with strong links to Pakistan's **Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)** agency. Established in 1990 after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, LeT began its jihad in the disputed province of Kashmir but by 2000 had expanded to urban terror campaigns. In Mumbai, its signature atrocities include the 2006 train bombings and the 2008 attacks. LeT has operated with the Taliban and al-Qaeda, being a major recruiter of Commonwealth citizens for AQ operations. LeT jihadis have fought in Chechnya, Iraq, Syria, Bosnia, and the Philippines. Other Islamist groups active in India include the **Student Islamic Movement of India (SIMI)**, banned since 2001, and its offshoot the **Indian Mujahideen (IM)**, who

claim responsibility for the 2011 Mumbai bombings. IM carried out those attacks with munitions and positioning provided by D-Company.

The Maoist **Naxalite** movement is mostly active in India's tribal northeast, and in a "Red Belt" of east-central Indian states. A classic rural guerrilla group, it has not yet trained up for urban terrorism, but it does recruit in Mumbai. The Dadar train station is a major Naxal meeting point, as is the Chitra Talkies cinema. Naxal urban cadre tradecraft calls for meets in crowds with plenty of exits; this may be a result of training by China's MSS. China provides (at a plausibly distant remove) Naxal weaponry through Burma, Nepal, and Communist port unions.

GOALS AND STORIES

A Naxalite attack in Mumbai would be huge news, just the sort of thing terrorists crave. But it could very well expose their whole network to reprisal. The Naxal are well aware that whenever LeT or IM set off bombs, the Mumbai police and CBI arrange a raft of encounter killings for senior Muslim gangsters. Are the Naxalite sympathizers in academia and culture (normally patriotic Bollywood has made a few pro-Naxal films recently), or the Naxals' MSS liaisons, more worried about a crackdown?

THE PARTIES

Mumbai is a historical stronghold of India's **Congress Party**, although a local faction called the **Nationalist Congress Party (NCP)** diverts some support. The NCP was formed in response to the rise of Marathi-regionalist and Hindu-nationalist politics, which had their most colorful flowering in **Shiv Sena**. Founded in 1966 by the cartoonist Bal Thackeray as a street-fighting anti-immigrant (especially south Indian immigrants) faction, Shiv Sena ("Shiva's Army") became a formal political party in 1993 after helping trigger the Mumbai riots in 1992 and 1993. In coalition with the Hindu-nationalist BJP, Shiv Sena won control of the Maharashtra state government, opening the spigots of corruption to its supporters and setting off a gang war against the Muslim D-Company. Shiv Sena support has fluctuated between the Gawli and Naik gangs, depending on cash flow and mobster rivalries. Bal Thackeray's nephew Raj Thackeray left the party in 2005 to start his own party, the Marathi-nationalist **Maharashtra Navnirman Sena**; rumbles

broke out between the Senas forthwith. Currently, a Shiv Sena-BJP coalition loosely controls Mumbai's city government, and the patronage, police power, and graft that goes with that. Bal's son Uddhav took over Shiv Sena after his father's death in 2012 – where Shiv Sena goes from there depends on local gangs as much as it does national politics.

GOALS AND STORIES

Shiv Sena hasn't consolidated its control of Mumbai – and probably can't, given the importance of Mumbai to national leaders in the rival Congress Party. With no overarching political party apparatus dominating the city, it's every pol for himself. Politicians and their parties need enforcers and money to win elections to get power to get money and pay enforcers. And sure, to get a sewer line put in, maybe. Every Mumbai neighborhood is a Chicago or Boston in miniature, run by a corrupt machine where anything might lurk in dark corners of influence. Local parties proliferate around charismatic villains or earnest reformers... who might be the same person, depending on your perspective.

THE INDUSTRY

Although since 1991 more modern cinematography and production values predominate in the movies, Bollywood, the Indian film industry based in Mumbai, still reminds any film buff of 1950s Hollywood. Actors make many films in a year and (except superstars) have little leverage, musical numbers are de rigueur, and the appearance of morality remains important to studios and audiences alike. Even a kissing scene can get a film banned in some Indian states, and actresses often retire or cut back after marriage to avoid even the image of adultery. (This turnover also opens the way for studios to hire younger, cheaper starlets, of course.) Like Hollywood then and now, the studios' finances are murky in the extreme. Whole film deals can literally be inked on a napkin, with floods of untraceable cash keeping the system going. Much of this money is mafia wealth, and the ties between organized crime and Bollywood are much speculated upon if seldom proved. The occasional glimpses paint the picture: actor Sanjay Dutt went on trial for gun running and abetting the 1993 bombings (and still starred in movies the whole time); actress Monica Bedi was accused of being secretly married to mob boss Abu Salem; unknown gangsters killed

two producers in 1997; in 2001, the CBI actually seized a film secretly produced by D-Company boss Chhota Shakeel and arrested its director, Bharat Shah. That film, an uncredited partial remake of *Pretty Woman*, went on to rule that year's box office.

Film stars are shaken down for protection and hired for lavish concerts in mafia hideaways, often by the same mobsters. But it's all worth it: actress Aishwarya Rai is literally worshipped as a goddess in some Indian temples. Film careers in Mumbai are dynastic in the extreme: director fathers hire actor sons, producer uncles cast actress nieces, actors use pull to bring family aboard as producers. Some clans, such as the Chopras and the Kapoors, are into their fourth generation as Bollywood players. This is not ironclad: the two biggest male stars of the last 50 years, Amitabh Bachchan and Shahrukh Khan, had no family connections in the industry. Winning Miss India or Miss World is

another excellent way to get cast in a few films regardless of your family. Bollywood may only create 1% of Mumbai's GDP, but it dominates both global and local perceptions of the city. And that, as any magician or politician can remind you, is more than good enough.

GOALS AND STORIES

Bollywood mostly wants to keep making movies, and to break their productions into the (smaller but vastly richer) mainstream Western film audience. Player characters with even tangential Hollywood connections may find social doors opening much faster in Bollywood than seems reasonable. ("You write horror stories? You have met Clive Barker? You will write our new film.") Politicians, criminal bosses, and industrialists have all gone to great lengths to meet and woo Bollywood celebrities. There is no reason in the world to think that vampires, Esoterror junkies, or Hastur cultists would be any different.



MUMBAI STORIES

Almost any RPG adventure in Mumbai thus has the potential to connect up with and draw in mobsters, terrorists, politicians, and even Bollywood stars. *Night's Black Agents* operations will more likely touch on the first two, while the manic image-making of the second pair doubtless hints at the horrors of the *Esoterrorists*. Even if your Mumbai scenario doesn't immediately present such possibilities, be aware of the tangled, colorful webs available to you for the ensnarement of galumphing heroes.

SEEDS AND HOOKS

These tidbits of lore and history turned up during my research. Any of them might be the kernel of a good villainous plot, or the intriguing backstory to an otherwise conventional adventure.

- The masked, whip-wielding heroine "Hunterwali" overwhelmed Bombay's popular consciousness in 1935 after the debut of her eponymous film. Whips, playing cards, sticks, belts, and other merchandise bore her name, image, and signature shout "Hey-y-y!" She (or the actress who played her, the Australian Mary "Fearless Nadia" Evans) might show up as a NPC (or an Investigator!) in a Pulp-style *Trail of Cthulhu* scenario. She might also manifest as a tulpa or other astral figure in an *Esoterrorists* investigation, or appear as a retro Hindi super in a *Mutant City Blues* game.

- On April 14, 1944, the steamship *SS Fort Stikine* exploded in Bombay harbor. Its cargo of cotton bales and lubricants caught fire, triggering a load of wartime ammunition and explosives. The blast killed 800 people and dropped gold bars

all across the city — the ship also carried £2 million worth of bullion to prop up the Indian economy. Gold flung from the blast is still sometimes found buried in sewers and slum dumps throughout western Mumbai.

- Mumbai's water comes from six lakes, and is stored in tanks around the city. Tony Malabar Hill sits atop the city's main underground reservoir, an ideal location for Deep Ones or aquatic vampires to lurk. The water filtration plant at Bhandup is the largest in India; the water in Mumbai's creeks and nearby ocean is unbelievably foul and polluted. Approximately a fifth of Mumbai's potable water is illegally siphoned off before reaching the faucet.

- Serial killer Raman Raghav bludgeoned over 30 people in Mumbai, mostly slum dwellers, in two spurts: 1965-66 and 1968. He believed he came from the world of Kanoon ("law"), and when arrested



was carrying “two pieces of paper with mathematical formulae on them.”

▪ The unsolved “Stoneman” killings in Mumbai’s Sion neighborhood in 1985-1988 had a similar *modus operandi*; the killer crushed sleeping indigents’ heads with a large stone or paving block. (Slayings with the same *m.o.* occurred in Calcutta in 1989, and in Guwahati in Assam in 2008.)

▪ The serial killer “Beer Man” in South Mumbai left beer cans near his seven victims between October 2006 and January 2007. They, too, were bludgeoned with stones, but were also stabbed in the torso.

▪ At least three multi-story buildings have collapsed in Mumbai in 2013. This rash of structural failures might have any number of explanations: government rent controls make maintenance cost-prohibitive, mobbed-up construction firms often replace cement in concrete with sand, and squatters or desperate future tenants often occupy buildings well before completion. But it might also be the sign of Something happening underground, or of megapolismantic workings in Mumbai aimed at some building in particular.

▪ In February 2012, vampire sightings and reports flooded in from Ghatkopar, Andheri, and other northeastern suburbs. The usual version involved the witness meeting a stranger, and waking up at home weak and sick, sometimes sporting odd wounds. Police investigations came to nothing. Possibly related: Mumbai does have a Shri Vetāl Temple dedicated to the “king of vampires” in Bandra near the Worli Sea Link bridge.

▪ Other urban terrors of Mumbai include

“oil men” who cover themselves with oil and become un-catchable; a tribe of child-napping cannibals with painted faces dwelling in the Chembur slums; the *chaddi baniyan* thieves who enter houses dressed only in an undershirt and briefs, trusting to their magical agility and speed; and the high-jumping “monkey man” who slashes victims with his metal claws, an Indian version of Springheel Jack.

MUMBAI MYTHOS

There are no references to Bombay, and very few references to India, in the core Cthulhu Mythos works of Lovecraft and his immediate circle. Randolph Carter likely spent some time studying magic in India: in his imposture as “Swami Chandraputra” he refers to “circles of adepts” there who can materialize thought, and Carter’s mentor Harley Warren received his mysterious occult book from India before his death below the Great Cypress Swamp.

Here are three possible Mumbai Mythos story seeds to grow on:

▪ The early attempts to join Mumbai’s seven islands failed when the sea-wall collapsed twice. In 1784 the chief engineer, of the Pathare Prabhu caste, dreamed he saw a statue of the goddess Laxmi under the ocean off Worli. He ordered the bay dredged, and built the Mahalaxmi Temple around the idol he found on the sea floor. It seems blasphemous to equate the beautiful and beneficent Laxmi with Mother Hydra, but perhaps the Nepalese-descended engineer had his own (Mi-Go implanted?) motives for making that equation.

▪ In the late 1920s, Persians from the city of Yazd immigrated to Bombay to escape a crippling drought. Yazd, both a silk-weaving center and a home to pre-Muslim survivals (mainly Zoroastrianism, but also other cults), held a cult that worshiped the Worm of the Apocalypse, a bhōle brought to Earth from Yaddith in the 3rd century A.D. Explosively melted after a great war by Ardashir of Parthia, fragments of the Worm remain embedded in a lead-glass flask now used to raise silkworms. The Cult was extirpated, and the Yazdi family who brought the flask to Bombay know nothing of the power they could wield. The only thing they know is their silkworms glisten with a particular yellow hue that makes it into their silk ... a hue that savants and scholars in Bombay recognize, and will kill for.

▪ Nagpanchami is the annual festival of snake-worship in India (usually in July or August). Members of the Sapera caste (traditional snake-charmers and snake-hunters) carry snakes around for offerings of milk, silver, and food. This seed can sprout in more than one directions. A cult of Yig within the Sapera caste is the obvious way to go; its origin and descent is unknown — Serpent folk, perhaps? Alternately, a vengeful Yig cult could hunt down Saperas for maltreating their snakes before and during the festival. 2,000 snakes die annually in Mumbai during Nagpanchami, often of abscessed fangs or starvation -- snakes don’t actually eat milk, so Saperas have been known to starve and dehydrate their snakes for up to a month beforehand to give the donors what they want.

THRILLING ELEMENTS: MUMBAI

Here are ten thrilling elements to introduce into a Mumbai chase scene (see *Night’s Black Agents*, p. 54):

- Mob of young, innocent schoolboys on bicycles
- Creaking, slow-moving truck, piled high with crates and pipes barely tied down
- Three or four cows, refusing to move
- Construction debris: bricks, wheelbarrows, picks and shovels, steel cables hanging down half-finished wall frames
- Propane tank, on a balcony or being delivered in a pedicab
- Maze of twisty alleys ideal for parkour, with pirated power cables running along the walls
- Pushcart full of melons
- Forest of ladders
- Flatbed truck, being recklessly driven
- Railroad tracks and oncoming overcrowded passenger train

SOURCES AND RESOURCES

Watching Bollywood films, in addition to their other merits, gives the non-Indian GM at least a beginning sense of day-to-day life in India, albeit usually for the upper class or for glamorized criminals. Since that's pretty much where most RPGs will focus at first, that's a good start. Mumbai's film colony, like those in Hong Kong and Los Angeles, loves to film their city. Ease into Bollywood with *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), directed by an appreciative outsider. Then consider a "historical trilogy" of Bollywood gangster films: *Once Upon a Time in Mumbai* (2011) covers the rise of Dawood Ibrahim to 1993, *Shootout at Wadala* (2013) begins the story of Mumbai's "encounter killings" in the 1980s, and *Black Friday* (2004) docu-

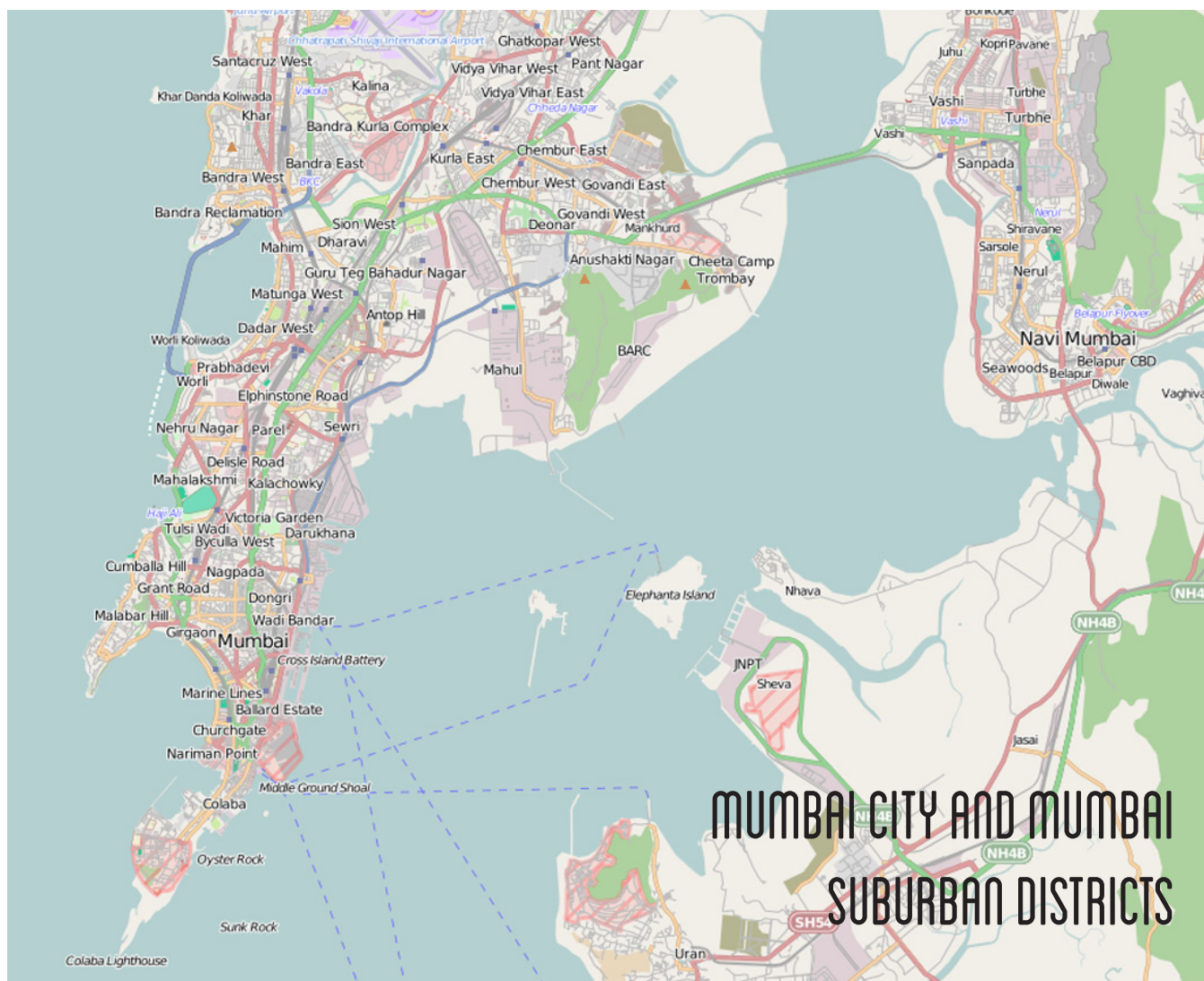
dramatizes the 1993 bombings. *Sarkar* (2005) and *Sarkar Raj* (2008) present the rise of Shiv Sena, appropriately enough in the idiom of the *Godfather* films.

Outside the crime genre, the film *Dhobi Ghat* (2011) is a neo-Realist (for Bollywood, anyway) art picture set in Mumbai's rarely filmed lower-class neighborhoods. *Life in a ... Metro* (2007) is an ensemble romantic comedy (and partial remake of Billy Wilder's *The Apartment*) deliberately crossing many segments of Mumbai society. *Lunchbox* (2013) is a romance, turning on Mumbai's weirdly efficient *dabbawallah* lunchbox delivery service. Again, worth a street-level look for "Mumbai as it is lived in."

The best single book on Mumbai is

Maximum City, by Suketu Mehta, which covers all of the above – crime, politics, movies, lunch -- and more. (The strange economy of Mumbai's bar dancers alone is worth the read.) If you're planning to emphasize Mumbai's wildly colorful and dangerous gangs, as well you should, the only source so far is *Dongri to Dubai: Six Decades of the Mumbai Mafia*, by S. Hussain Zaidi. And as always, Lonely Planet comes through with the RPG sourcebooks that aren't: *Lonely Planet Goa & Mumbai* also offers GMs the option of setting adventures among the young, rich, and trendy party crowd of India's leading resort. I also used the *DK Eyewitness Travel Guide India* while putting this together: it provided different details, along with many more pictures.

MAPS



MUMBAI CITY AND MUMBAI SUBURBAN DISTRICTS

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